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# Sustainable Community-Based Tourism in Cambodia and Tourists' Willingness to Pay

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Community-Based Tourism (CBT) sites are often seen as a tool for poverty alleviation and eradication, especially in Least Developed Countries like Cambodia. CBT as a development tool has been critically examined in recent years in a development cooperation context, but also in academic literature. Two of the major discussion points are the approaches used both to establish, and ensure the financial sustainability CBT sites. This paper seeks to contribute to these discussions by examining the viability of the classical top-down CBT model in comparison to the bottom up approach to promote sustainable tourism development in Cambodia in consideration of the Sustainable Development Goals. The often-missing financial sustainability frequently happens due to a lack of management skills and a lack of knowledge of pricing in the communities. Based on this notion, this paper also contributes to the discussion by examining the willingness to pay of different target groups (i.e., locals, expatriates, and international tourists), and presents two arguments in support of a stronger emphasis of the local and, especially, the expatriate market. Firstly, expatriates display significantly higher willingness to pay than international tourists, and, secondly, expatriate support allows CBT sites to build an understanding of potential customers' needs, thereby supporting a more organic and sustainable growth.

**Keywords:** Cambodia; Community-Based Tourism; SDGs; Sustainable Tourism; Willingness to Pay

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## INTRODUCTION

With the goal of achieving peace and prosperity for people and the planet, the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are an urgent call for action in a global partnership by all countries. Tourism has been identified as one of the tools to foster economic benefits in least developed countries (SDG target 14.7.), with particular importance for the tourism industry being SDGs number 8 and 12. These advocate for the promotion of sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment, and decent work for all as well as ensuring sustainable consumption and production patterns (World Tourism Organization, 2017). However, tourism endeavors, while often leading to economic growth in Least Developed Countries (LDCs), can also cause substantial

negative impact, such as an unequal distribution of revenue (Alam & Paramati, 2016), low-skilled employment (Davidson & Sahli, 2015), and a low degree of residents' empowerment (Hatipoglu, Alvarez, & Ertuna, 2016), amongst others.

When it comes to tourism, some argue that the eradication of poverty will require the use of Community-Based Tourism (CBT) approaches in order for economic growth to be fully sustainable and realized (Bramwell, 2010; Choi & Murray, 2010). CBT often comes with locally-developed tourism products, public-private cooperation, and sustainable tourism measurements, which are increasingly recognized as means to achieve economic growth, reduce inequalities, improve livelihoods in developing countries (hence, contribute to Goal 8), and alleviate negative environmental and sociocultural impacts (Khan, Bibi, Lorenzo, Lyu, & Babar, 2020). Specifically relevant for the present paper is target 8.9, which emphasizes the importance of sustainable tourism: "by 2030, devise and implement policies to promote sustainable tourism that create jobs and promotes local culture and products" (United Nations, 2017). Furthermore, the relevance of sustainable tourism is also highlighted in SDG target 12.b, with the goal to "develop and implement tools to monitor sustainable development impact for sustainable tourism that creates jobs and promotes local culture and products" (World Tourism Organization, 2017). The latter is of particular significance for LDCs, as the goal advocates the implementation of sustainable tourism, which creates a variety of jobs locally while respecting the local culture and the promotion of local produce (Switch Asia, 2015).

However, studies have also shown that CBT projects do not necessarily provide a mechanism for an equitable flow of benefits to all tourism stakeholders (e.g., Dixey, 2008). A model that receives particular critique is the classical top-down CBT model that is often applied in Cambodia (Mueller, Markova, & Ponnappureddy, 2020). Top-down models are usually created by external actors, which leads to a strong dependency on the support of these actors (Garrod, 2003). This study is based on this critique of the classical top-down CBT model and contributes to the discussion on how CBT sites can achieve financial stability by targeting domestic and regional markets, thereby increasing socio-economic benefits in the communities without being dependent on external factors (e.g., funding, donors, and distributors).

In particular, this paper seeks to contribute to the understanding of different tourist-segments' willingness to pay (WTP), thereby providing a groundwork to support the notion that targeting domestic markets is financially reasonable as well. It does so on the assumption that the tourists' WTP differs across the following groups: local residents (Cambodian citizens), international residents (expatriates), and international tourists visiting Cambodia. This a priori segmentation is based on the premise that international tourists on short-term visits are known to display different traits from expatriates living and working abroad over longer periods (Bruner, Kessy, Jesse, James, & Jorge, 2015). Empirical evidence also shows different behavior in domestic and international visitors (Dutt, Harvey, & Shaw, 2018; Jones, Yang, & Yamamoto, 2016; Michael, Armstrong, Badran, & King, 2011; Valek, 2017).

Therefore, the segments in this paper are specifically divided into the following tourist groups: (1) Cambodians, (2) expatriates, and (3) international tourists. It is important to note that the overall price of consumption consists of several components that contribute to the overall CBT experience (Morrison, 2013), which is

why this study considers the various service components – such as lodging, food, and activities – separately. Two main research questions drive this study: (1) What are visitors to CBT sites in Cambodia willing to pay for? (2) Are there significant differences between locals, expatriates, and tourists regarding their WTP? To answer these questions, this paper sets out the theoretical framework, looking first at CBT approaches and their implementations, followed by the construct of willingness to pay, and adopts a quantitative methodology for data collection.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

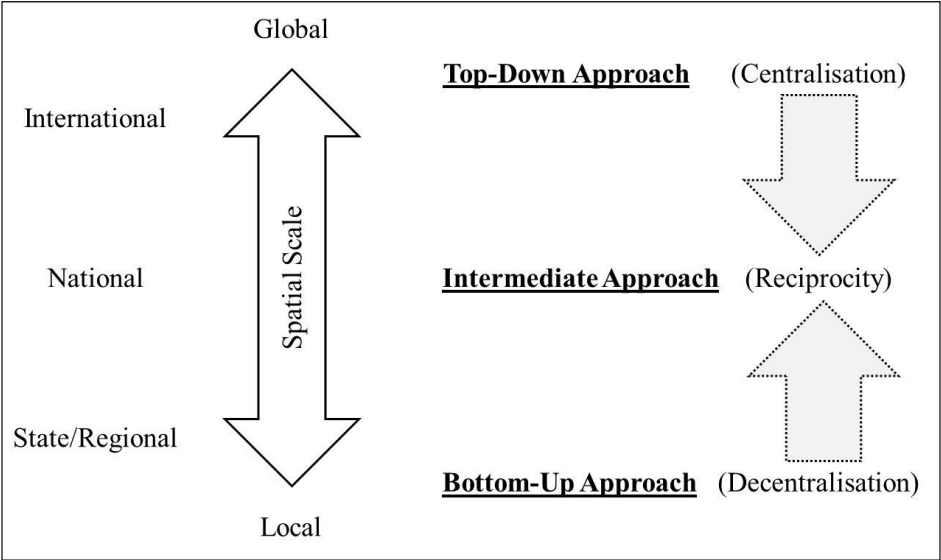
### *Sustainable Community-Based Tourism Development Approaches*

CBT is widely recognized for its ability to improve local economies because it often improves the quality of infrastructures, which benefits the residents' quality of life (Dodds, Ali, & Galaski, 2018; Kayat, Ramli, Mat-Kasim, & Abdul-Razak, 2014). It also can offer opportunities for residents to appreciate and respect the local socio-ecosystem (Brunt & Courtney, 1999; Ruiz-Ballesteros, 2011). Overall, successfully implemented CBT projects can help alleviate poverty because they contribute to community development, thereby putting the SDGs in practice. However, many of the CBT sites around the world often struggle to achieve financial stability and thereby fail to provide the socio-economic benefits CBTs are credited for, as their governance and pricing structure are not agile enough to respond to the free market supply and demand (Kiss, 2004; Mueller et al., 2020). This includes monetary aspects (e.g., communities do not have the financial power to develop tourism sites), funding aspects (e.g., government, donor organization, or NGOs support), and the lack of know-how amongst community members (e.g., how to offer attractive prices to receive more visitors). In particular, the reduction of governmental and donor support is potentially devastating to such CBT sites because facilities cannot be maintained appropriately without financial support (Hall, 2007; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017). Hence, research also shows that a lack of financial resources and capital are the main challenges faced by CBT sites (Aref, 2011; Kunjuraman & Hussin, 2017).

As shown in Figure 1, most CBT sites are based on either a top-down or bottom-up approach. Most top-down CBT sites are created by external actors, focused on international markets, and strongly dependent on the support of mediator organizations, such as NGOs, consultancies or donor organizations.

The literature demonstrates that the government-community (top-down) approach to tourism planning and management is mostly ineffective in the long term (Garrod, 2003), and also more bureaucratic (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016). Furthermore, the planning process is often centralized and starts at the government level by dictating strategic policies for tourism development (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016). As a result, the top-down approach fails to provide opportunities and/or incentives to the local communities to further develop CBT projects (Kubickova & Campbell, 2020). The bottom-up approach, on the contrary, follows the principle by which local communities set their own goals and make decisions about their resources in the future. This also includes the preservation of cultural heritage, the development of buildings, parks, open spaces, and landscapes, as well as other protection or development activities.

Figure 1. Top-Down and Bottom-Up Approach for CBT Development. (Theerapappisit, 2012)



The decision-making process is thereby initiated by local groups (Theerapappisit, 2012), ideally, without having derived or made their ideas dependent on local, regional, central or international government agencies. Initiatives that follow this process ought to reflect and construct a vision of future developments that match the local values (Howitt, 2002, p. 18). Edwards (1989) suggests that this process initiated from the ground up leads to an appreciation of indigenous knowledge systems and promotes participation towards various future scenarios centered on people and the environment (Theerapappisit, 2012). In Cambodia, government policies as originated from the grassroots have not been a preferred choice for policymakers and therefore most of the CBT sites emerged from the top-down approach.

It has been further noted that, without the ongoing support of external organizations, top-down-driven CBT sites often fail to translate into the local context and struggle to succeed in connecting with local tourism chains (Harrison & Schipani, 2007). Conversely, the bottom-up approach, born and funded by local people with an initial focus on the national market, can be a vehicle to encourage a more sustainable development. This focus on domestic and regional markets makes it easier for CBT members to understand the needs of the consumers, to identify investment opportunities, and to design and develop tailored, competitive products that can be marketed domestically and to neighboring countries (Zapata, Hall, Lindo, & Vanderschaeghe, 2011).

Implementation Approaches for Community-Based Tourism

Research confirms the positive socioeconomic benefits and potential linkages of CBT for the local economy in countries with high dependency on low-return manufacturing, rural industries, and those recovering from political unrest (Beeton, 2006;

Lapeyre, 2010; Yanes, Zielinski, Diaz Cano, & Kim, 2019). As CBT is highly localized, it can help reduce poverty as a result of bringing direct benefits to its communities by integrating low-skilled workers into the workforce in remote areas. Tourism and CBT are therefore often seen as tools to improve development opportunities, particularly in rural areas (Harrison & Schipani, 2007; Hummel, Gujadhur, & Ritsma, 2013; Jiang, DeLacy, Mkiramweni, & Harrison, 2011; Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008; Zapata et al., 2011). Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET), in particular, promises potential for economic and social development in less-developed countries due to a direct link between harnessing environmental assets for tourism as a means for both conservation and financial returns (George & Henthorne, 2007; Mvula, 2001). It is optimistically assumed that increased wealth will lead to the trickling-down effects of economic benefits that can lead to a higher standard of living (Gössling, 2002; Rogerson, 2007). While ecotourism is regarded as one of the most common manifestations of sustainable tourism development, there are other common approaches promoted to achieve sustainability. These include Pro-Poor Tourism (PPT), Community-Based Tourism (CBT), or Community-Based Ecotourism (CBET).

In particular, CBT is regarded as the form of tourism that helps local communities generate additional income. Thus, CBT – usually with the support of another organization (government or NGO) – focuses on the community and the adoption of tourism into the community in an appropriate way. Nevertheless, the involvement of third-party organizations raises criticism because it often fosters a reliance on Western ideas of development with little attention being paid to local views and knowledge (Dodds et al., 2018; Goodwin & Font, 2014; Kiss, 2004). This raises incongruent objectives and unachievable expectations for local socio-economic growth and leads to a dependency on third-party donor organizations (Buccus, Hemson, Hicks, & Piper, 2008; Manyara & Jones, 2007). If CBT is implemented to maximize the benefits for the local communities, all three pillars of sustainable tourism development – i.e., economic efficiency, social value, and environmental sustainability – have to be respected so the community gains control of tourism from early planning stages onward. It is not surprising then, that it was found that this is best achieved when communities receive constructive insight into sustainable management (Mbaiwa, 2004; Muhanna, 2007). Certain cases provide evidence that these efforts in promoting sustainable tourism development lead to greater awareness of environmental issues among communities and that there are significant livelihood gains for CBET members and the community as a whole (Lonn, Mizoue, Ota, Kajisa, & Yoshida, 2018; Reimer & Walter, 2013).

However, in some cases where CBT project members receive direct financial benefits it has led to jealousy and division (Dolezal, 2015). As a result, stakeholders are often concerned with the ongoing financial viability and future business sustainability of the projects (Pawson, D'Arcy, & Richardson, 2017; Reimer & Walter, 2013). The question of financial sustainability is frequently raised in existing CBT literature (Colomer Matutano, 2012; O'Reilly, 2014; Spenceley, 2010), highlighting the point that communities need clear guidelines on how to develop and successfully manage a tourism product, and on how they should devise marketing and visitor management strategies (Stoeckl, 2008). Such strategies need to be tailored to the different types of tourism markets who experience tourism in different ways. It is assumed, for example, that knowledge regarding country and culture amongst international travelers versus

national tourists and expatriates differs, hence leading to different expectations. These possible negative experiences of international travelers consequently have a more negative impact on the success of CBT sites (e.g., bad ratings on TripAdvisor might lead to avoidance of visiting the CBT site among other potential international visitors).

### **Willingness to Pay**

Theoretically, the concept of willingness to pay (WTP) is often used to indicate the maximum amount that consumers intend to pay for a specific service or product. WTP is determined by the economic value and the utility the product has to the consumer. It also includes a subjective component because the same product might be of different utility and value to different consumers leading to differences in their WTP (Carlsson & Johansson-Stenman, 2000; Garroux & Fyall, 2000; Kyle, Graefe, & Manning, 2005; Reynisdottir, Song, & Agrusa, 2008). In the context of ecotourism, WTP-studies show to which extent consumers are willing to compensate for their involvement in eco-friendly travel destinations (Cheung & Jim, 2014; Hultman, Kazemina, & Ghasemi, 2015; Meleddu & Pulina, 2016). The studies display how the demand for variation in eco-friendly tourist destinations, as well as the desire for unique destinations, influences willingness to spend more on these types of products (Amendah & Park, 2008; Lee, Lee, Kim, & Mjelde, 2010; Morey, Buchanan, & Waldman, 2002). However, top-down managed CBT sites' focus on international markets remains often unchallenged, with a lack of studies that look into the WTP of different market segments of ecotourism.

A visitor segment often neglected in WTP studies are expatriates or individuals who live and/or work in a foreign country for an extended period of time (Isakovic & Forseth Whitman, 2013), even though it has been found that expatriates move abroad not only for work reasons but that part of their key motivations are also tourism-related (Lauring, Selmer, & Jacobsen, 2014; Vielhaber, Husa, Jöstl, Veress, & Wieser, 2014). Due to globalization and increased travel (at least prior to COVID-19), numbers are growing, which would suggest that further consideration needs to be given towards this market to facilitate a more comprehensive review and acknowledge any potential differences between domestic travelers, international visitors, and expatriates (Dutt et al., 2018). Few studies are available that examine expatriates' role in the delivery of tourism products (e.g. Dutt et al., 2018; Valek, 2017). Jones et al. (2016), for example, found that in a tourism context, expatriates display different expenditure patterns than domestic residents, a point that is worth exploring further.

### **Regional Context**

The Kingdom of Cambodia is located at the Gulf of Thailand with neighboring countries Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. Cambodia has a population of 16 million people, of which approximately 80-95% are Khmer, turning Cambodia into the most ethnically homogeneous country in Southeast Asia. Cambodia is rich in natural resources and its potential for tourism has been recognized by the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC).

In Cambodia, tourism is regarded as one of the country's key industry sectors, as acknowledged in the government's Rectangular Strategy for Growth, Employment,



**Table 1. Foreign Visitor Arrivals to the Regions in January - November 2018. (Ministry of Tourism, 2018)**

	Arrivals			Share (%)	Change (%)	
	2016	2017	2018	2018	17/16	18/17
Phnom Penh & Surrounding	2,445,830	2,710,208	3,122,774	49.0	10.8	15.2
Siem Reap Angkor	1,954,708	2'190,063	2,323,168	36.5	12.0	6.1
Coastal Areas	574,985	666,939	857,800	13.5	16.0	28.6
Eco-tourism Areas	58,767	65,373	67,683	1.1	11.2	3.5
Total	5,034,290	5,632,583	6,371,425	100.0	11.9	13.1

Equity, and Efficiency (Royal Government of Cambodia, 2013). In 2019, the contribution of travel and tourism to the country's GDP was USD 7,110.2 million (26.4% of the total economy) (WTTC, 2020). As shown in Table 1, Cambodia recorded 6.2 million tourist arrivals in 2018 and is aiming to double this figure by 2025 (not taking into consideration the impacts of COVID-19) (see Table 1).

The country of Cambodia is still overly dependent on its most popular tourism site Angkor Wat and the capital city Phnom Penh, which means that, historically, the government has mostly neglected the development of tourism (including ecotourism) around other points of interest in the country. Following global initiatives, the Royal Government of Cambodia strives to increasingly develop and promote sustainable and inclusive ecotourism development. Certain cases provide evidence that these efforts in promoting sustainable tourism development lead to a greater awareness of environmental issues among communities, and that there are significant livelihood gains for CBET members and the community as a whole (Lonn et al., 2018; Reimer & Walter, 2013). The Ministry of Tourism in Cambodia (MoT) has identified tourism zones with high potential for eco-tourism development, and the Department of Ecotourism within the Ministry of Environment (MoE) in Cambodia also strives to develop and promote sustainable and inclusive ecotourism development. Multi-stakeholder collaboration mechanisms, ecotourism linkages, and connectivity between the 49 protected areas (PAs) and ecotourism knowledge management systems and platforms are supported. For the most part, ecotourism in Cambodia is still small-scale and community-based, and holds a limited share of total tourism visits. Figure 2 (next page) shows the location of CB(E)T sites in Cambodia.

The latest numbers from the MoT have shown that CB(E)T projects in Cambodia received 10,185 international visitors in February 2019. To date, however, very little knowledge exists regarding the number of national tourists to CBT sites in Cambodia. However, obtaining reliable statistical data proves difficult because most of the knowledge regarding CBT in Cambodia remains compiled through case studies (Carter, Thok, O'Rourke, & Pearce, 2015; Lonn et al., 2018; Pawson et al., 2017; Reimer & Walter, 2013; Ven, 2016; Walter & Reimer, 2012). Results tend to be limited to an analysis of one or more CBT sites, their tourism offerings and infrastructure, but with little differentiation found in terms of products offered by Cambodia's CBT sites. This is mainly the result of most CBT projects being located in protected areas or within close proximity to sites of outstanding natural beauty. Furthermore, it is found that the vast majority of CBT sites in Cambodia lack clear pricing structures



and focus on short-term gains, which in turn leads to an insufficient understanding of relevant target groups and appropriate pricing that would sustain and grow visitor numbers in the long-term.

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strategy that respects both aspects, tourism administrators need a reliable estimation of visitors' WTP (Hultman et al., 2015). The WTP is generally defined as the maximum price consumers are willing to pay for a certain product (Kalish & Nelson, 1991).

The present research therefore is designed to gather knowledge about the WTP for certain CBT services by different customer segments. In addition, it is also an attempt to investigate whether local market potential exists for new CBT sites entering the market.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample and Data Collection

Data was collected through structured face-to-face interviews as well as online surveys (using Google forms) among expatriates, Cambodians, and international tourists in Cambodia (i.e., the three main visitor segments). The collection took place during the months of September and October 2018 in Phnom Penh. The research respondents were selected across a range of those three main visitor segments based on the current profile of visitors provided by the CBT projects. Currently, no official data on the profile of CBT visitors in Cambodia exists, as both the Cambodian government and the CBT projects do not have the capacity or technical expertise to collect and aggregate this kind of data. Through in-person qualitative interviews with five CBT project coordinators/ community leaders, the three subsegments of CBT visitors were identified for the study. Both those who have and have not been visitors to the CBT site were selected for the study, as the main focus was on those who would consider or were willing to include a CBT visit or experiences as part of their holidays.

Due to the high diversity in respondents, with a range of language abilities, access to internet, and a varied ability to complete the online questionnaire, both options of online survey and structured face-to-face interviews were offered using English language. This enabled us to engage with visitors from the ASEAN region and some European countries whose first language often is not English. While many non-native speakers have a high level of spoken English and listening skills, it is known from experience working and delivering tourism products that many might struggle with reading and writing. Because many CBT sites are not easily accessible and the presence of visits at the site was not guaranteed, the researchers decided not to collect data from CBT sites through personal interviews due to budget and time constraints. Thus, the respondents were not required to have visited a CBT site previously.

The questionnaire followed a direct approach and was designed to provide insights into the WTP on CBT services among the targeted visitor segments. A total of 14 questions were presented, with fixed alternatives to choose from, aiming at pricing of accommodation services, F&B services, and extra services. The fixed alternative price categories were chosen based on the current pricing structure of CBT services. For the low-value products and services, a narrow price range was selected, as even a \$1 increase in the WTP for these services could deliver up to 50% in increased revenue for the local community. For the higher-value services, the range brackets were widened to provide more logical and practical options for the correspondents to choose from. The use of fixed alternative options and basic language also enabled easier

**Table 2. Distribution of Visitor Segments. (Authors' survey)**

Variable	Frequency	Percentage
Visitor Segment		
Cambodian	18	6.7
Expat	89	33.5
International Tourist	159	59.8
Total	266	100

understanding of the research questions by non-native speakers who might have otherwise struggled with more complex research questions seeking more qualitative data. This would have led to less reliable data being collected by the researchers. This seemingly complex system allowed for the primary data set to be used for this study but also enabled the researchers to provide information to individual CBT projects looking to increase the price of their services. In addition, the last question was designed as an open-ended question to allow for subjective opinions and to solicit additional suggestions. Demographic characteristics (gender, age, and country of origin) were included at the end of the questionnaire. Table 2 shows the number of responses per visitor segment. The largest number of respondents is represented by international tourists, accounting for 60% of all respondents.

Answers of all 266 respondents were kept for analysis purposes, although a few alterations were made; for example, a single African country was grouped in the 'African' label for country of origin to create a more coherent sample group. The data was analyzed through descriptive statistics, such as frequencies or cross tabulations.

### **Data Analysis**

Due to the survey design, priority was given to the analysis of quantitative data. The data was analyzed using IBM SPSS 24 software. The procedure consisted of two steps. First, descriptive statistics were used to describe the demographic information of the respondents. Secondly, the respondents' WTP for different services was compared across Cambodians, expatriates, and international visitors. The indicated WTP was compared using Chi-square tests and we did not control for any confounding effects. The hypotheses were tested at a significance level of 0.05.

## **RESULTS**

### **Demographics**

Table 3 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The variables show that the majority of Cambodian and expatriates were female, whereas the vast majority of international travelers were male. All three visitor segments were mainly between the age groups of 21 to 40 years. Roughly, 30% of all expatriates were over the age of 41 years. On the contrary, only about 10% of Cambodians and international travelers were older than 41 years. The majority of expatriates (60.7%) as well as tourists (49.1%) were from Europe.

**Table 3. Demographics. (Authors' survey)**

Variable	Percentage of Respondents			Chi-Square	<i>p</i>
	Cambodian	Expat	Tourist		
Gender					
Female	77.8	53.9	29.5	24.754	.000
Male	22.2	46.1	70.5		
Age					
20 and under	5.6	2.2	0.6	22.373	.004
21 to 30	55.6	33.7	60.4		
31 to 40	27.8	36.0	27.7		
41 to 50	5.6	13.5	5.0		
51 and over	5.6	14.6	6.3		
Origin					
Australia and Pacific	0.0	14.6	11.3	48.188	.000
North/South America	0.0	11.2	5.0		
Africa	0.0	1.1	3.8		
Asia	100.0	12.4	30.8		
Europe	0.0	60.7	49.1		

### Willingness to Pay (WTP)

In the following subsections, the respondents' willingness to pay for tourism services was compared across the three different visitor segments.

#### *WTP for Accommodation*

Respondents were asked how much they would be willing to pay for a private room in a homestay setting, which is offered as part of the CBT project.

Table 4 shows the mean values of respondents' WTP compared across Cambodians, expatriates, and international tourists. A significant difference between all three visitor segments can be noticed in regards to WTP for a private room. 40% of all expatriates were willing to pay USD 7-10, whereas only 18% of Cambodians were willing to pay within the same price range. The majority of tourists were willing to pay USD 5-6.

**Table 4. Willingness to Pay - Accommodation. (Authors' survey)**

Variable	Percentage of Respondents			Chi-Square	<i>p</i>
	Cambodian	Expat	Tourist		
Private room					
1 – 2	0	0	0	24.220	0.000
3 – 4	33	12	17		
5 – 6	50	47	57		
7 – 8	11	15	19		
9 – 10	6	26	6		

*WTP for Food and Beverage*

While staying in the village, visitors have the opportunity to taste locally-made traditional food. Meals usually consist of Cambodian curries and fresh vegetable dishes. The dishes are prepared using traditional cooking methods with locally-grown ingredients. Sharing a meal with the host family provides visitors the ideal opportunity to share stories and learn more about each other's cultures in a relaxed and friendly atmosphere. Most meals are provided by the same homestay family. However, some projects have a sharing scheme where meals are provided by a different family to ensure an equal share of revenue within the village.

Respondents were asked how much they would be willing to pay for breakfast, lunch, and dinner separately. As shown in Table 5, all respondents were willing to pay the highest amount for dinner and the lowest amount for breakfast. However, there were differences across the three visitor segments. In the case of breakfast and lunch, the majority of all visitors were willing to pay USD 2. However, in comparison to Cambodians and tourists, a higher share of expatriates were willing to pay USD 3 for breakfast (12%) or USD 4 lunch (11%). In the case of dinner, the majority of Cambodians (56%) were willing to pay USD 2, whereas the majority of tourists (57%) were willing to pay USD 3. Roughly half of all expatriates (39%) would pay USD 3 for dinner and 11% would pay USD 5, which is the highest share of all segments.

*WTP for Guiding Services*

There is neither a clear definition nor guidelines on how community guiding services should be offered. This means that in practice, there is a wide range of services labeled as 'local guiding services' being offered by CBT projects with inconsistent levels

**Table 5. Willingness to Pay – Food and Beverages. (Authors' survey)**

Variable		Percentage of Respondents			Chi-Square	p
		Cambodian	Expat	Tourist		
Breakfast						
USD	1	39	39	20	19.502	0.001
	2	56	49	76		
	3	5	12	4		
Lunch						
USD	1	17	10	3	32.423	0.000
	2	61	55	50		
	3	17	22	45		
	4	5	11	1		
	5	0	2	1		
Dinner						
USD	1	11	7	1	34.367	0.000
	2	56	32	34		
	3	17	39	57		
	4	16	11	6		
	5	0	11	2		

of quality. A mixed ability of spoken English, levels of experience, or understanding of what might be of interest to the visitors can be noticed, often resulting in no ‘real’ benefit to the visitors. As a result, anecdotal evidence showed that visitors have a mixed interest in paying for these services. Furthermore, due to the limited scope of this research, the authors were not able to examine the determining factors that would motivate potential visitors to purchase these services; instead, the authors focused on the amount respondents wished to pay for the tour guiding services.

Respondents were asked, “If you are 1-2 people, how much would you be willing to pay in total for a local English-speaking tour guide per day?” The reason why this very specific question was chosen is because, for the vast majority of the CBT projects in Cambodia, the cost for tour guiding is charged per group rather than per individual. This means that for those travelers in larger groups, the cost of tour guiding is minimal if divided between all the members of the group. However, if the same service is purchased by only one or two people, the cost of tour guiding can easily become significant compared to the cost of the rest of the CBT services. This framing of the question implies that the costs being presented below are not payment being made per visitor, but the total cost for a local, English-speaking tour guide for a full day of work. 133 respondents (50%) indicated that they thought the price range for a full day services of a local tour guide should be within the USD 6-10 range. 16% were willing to pay USD 11-16 and only 20% were willing to pay more than USD 15. Table 6 compares the WTP of the three visitor segments.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### Theoretical Implications Regarding CBT Planning Approaches

Zapata et al. (2011) identified the bottom-up and top-down models as the two main CBT planning approaches – with each representing different characteristics. As discussed earlier in this article, the top-down model is often implemented by external organizations, poorly translated or adapted to the cultural context, and focusing on international markets (Boukas & Ziakas, 2016). Meanwhile, the bottom-up model focuses on the domestic and regional market and is born and funded by locals (Theerapappisit, 2012). Zapata et al. (2011) also argue that the project formulation and development of tourism ideally is based on the local communities’ networks,

**Table 6. Willingness to Pay – Guiding services. (Authors’ survey)**

Variable	Percentage of Respondents			Chi-Square	p	
	Cambodian	Expat	Tourist			
Guiding Services						
USD	1 – 5	33	14	28	39.031	0.000
	6 – 10	44	42	55		
	11 – 15	6	24	13		
	16 – 20	0	15	3		
	21 – 30	17	4	1		
	>30	0	1	0		



with a natural tendency to focus on the local market as its closest supplier. Based on this notion, this article examined the WTP of domestic travelers and expatriates as well as the international travelers for products and services offered by CBT sites in Cambodia. At the moment, the pricing for CBT services is being set by the local communities – who mostly copy what other CBT projects are doing in terms of setting the same pricing levels, without taking in consideration the quality or services, location, or awareness of the site, as well as not being at all responsive to the different tourism segments and the current market drivers. There are no low- and high-season prices or domestic visitors' discounts that would stimulate the growth of local tourism. In addition, the external donor organizations and the Cambodian government primarily focus on long-haul markets. This, in turn, often transfers the main pricing decision-making power to the hands of tour operators, who capture most of the tourism revenue. In this context, the potential socioeconomic impacts of CBT are likely to remain limited and therefore serve SDG 1 and 8 only to a limited extent.

### **Theoretical Implications Regarding Traveler Segments for CBT Sites**

The inclusion of expatriates in this discussion of potential target markets has demonstrated that an expatriate's WTP is significantly higher than that of international travelers, thus making it an attractive target group from a financial point of view, but also from a knowledge perspective. Expatriates have considerably more knowledge about the respective country, which can help to overcome communication hurdles. The community can use expatriates as a source of information, assisting in compiling knowledge about different cultures and travel requirements. This can help to develop CBT products before selling them to international tourists.

Yet, the results do not explain why expatriates express a higher WTP than the other two segments. It might be explained by the fact that expatriates have higher income levels, yet equally low living costs as locals, resulting in a higher purchasing power. Furthermore, it is assumed that expatriates are better connected with the host country, and therefore more aware of the residents' living conditions than international travelers. All of these factors may lead to a higher willingness to support the local rural population, and thus a higher willingness to pay. Despite their growing number, tourism research primarily uses the same characteristics to describe expatriates as the overall pool of residents. In some specific contexts, such as destination perception, expatriates are completely ignored (Dutt et al., 2018). This study thus provides further evidence that expatriates show different traits to other traveler segments, which highlights the need to examine expatriates as potential tourists and as a heterogeneous group of residents. To what extent expatriates display a similar behavior should be the focus of further research. Nevertheless, residents are a reasonable target market for CBT sites because they are sensitive to the meaning and values of local communities.

### **Practical Implications and Linkages to SDGs**

Evidence from the field shows that for CBTs in Cambodia the provision of accommodation generates the lowest revenue stream. Other sources of income, such as food and beverages and tour guiding, provide higher economic benefits to Cambodian

CBT sites. This finding has implications regarding the planning of future CBT sites if economic growth and employment opportunities (SDG 8) are the underlying goals for the development of rural areas. Currently, CBT products in Cambodia are marketed as “homestay” accommodation. In the future, a shift in marketing may be necessary towards a more experience-based marketing. When redesigning and developing sustainable tourism experiences, stakeholders will benefit by considering the community’s strengths and their needs, as well as the markets’ needs, while concurrently facilitating and rewarding a memorable experience for the visitors. Tourism businesses also will need to design attractive experiential offerings targeted to local and national markets, suggesting they focus on rediscovering local cultural and natural heritage.

At the country level, an issue of the ‘Dollarization of the Cambodian economy’ can be noticed – i.e., the process whereby a country recognizes the U.S. dollar as a medium of exchange alongside, and often in place of, its domestic currency, in this case the Cambodian Riel. This has a negative impact on low-cost services, as the difference between USD 1 and USD 1.5 is very small for an international visitor – only 50c, which in monetary terms has no value for most international visitors. However, for a local rural community member, i.e. someone who provides this low-cost service, the difference signifies a 50% increase in income. Even though the local currency exists, the vast majority of private sector providers and businesses use U.S. dollars as the main business currency. This system is also used by the hospitality industry and CBT projects, and, as result, communities could be deprived of potential additional revenue and remain in poverty (SDG1).

This loss is mainly due to the fact that the minimal USD note in use in Cambodia is the 1 USD note (no USD coins are in circulation). Thus, prices are regularly rounded to the whole dollar – mostly down rather than up. Since one price set is used for local and international visitors, rounding costs up leads to services being too expensive/unexpectable for local Cambodian visitors. Therefore, dollarization prevents a wider range of prices that could be used if the local Riel was the only currency. Extreme poverty – defined as living below the monetary threshold of USD 1.90 per person/day – is still very high in rural areas of Cambodia (Independent Group of Scientists appointed by the Secretary-General, 2019). In order to use CBT as a tool for poverty alleviation, more informed data (based on supply and demand) on the pricing of CBT services is needed to maximize the socio-economic benefit and impact of CBT initiatives on the poverty levels of those involved in these initiatives. Nevertheless, economic activity should be seen not as an end in itself, but rather as a means for sustainably advancing human capabilities.

In addition, from a practical point of view, this study also provides implications for managers and policy makers of Cambodian CBT sites. Currently, CBT sites in Cambodia focus on the international tourism market, which comes with high investment and marketing costs. Analyzing the results obtained in this research, it has been shown that expatriates are willing to pay the highest prices for most tourism services in comparison to international travelers and Cambodians. Consequently, from an economic viewpoint, CBT sites should target segments with a higher WTP. A particular benefit stems from the fact that expatriates are presumably a niche market, which allows the CBT sites to grow organically without reaching their carrying capacity

too soon. In addition, further benefits that could arise from a bottom-up approach might also support a greater uptake of sustainable environmental practices by the CBT. The organic and therefore slower growth of the site provides the opportunity for the government and other partners to raise awareness of the principles of sustainable consumption and production (SCP) (SDG 12) among the community members before the site reaches its capacity limits (Mueller et al., 2020). So far, in Cambodia, SCP played a role in several industry sectors, such as energy (Jong, 2016). Waste management has been addressed as a cross cutting issue (e.g., reducing plastic bag waste in major cities), however, so far, SCP principles are neither discussed nor promoted with respect to CBT or ecotourism.

An additional point worth making is that, until now, no impact measurement system exists in Cambodia to evaluate the environmental and economic impact of CBT sites on the local communities and the local biodiversity. In practice, this means that there is no empirical evidence or evidence-based framework used to ensure that existing initiatives, both at local and national level, have contributed towards the implementation of the SDGs at the national level in Cambodia. Even though some NGOs working locally have started to look at the mechanism for measuring the social and environmental impact of CBT, there is very little collective consensus within the sector or the government to see this issue as a major priority.

### **Limitations and Further Research**

First and foremost, caution should be applied when generalizing the research results. The WTP approach allows us to attribute an economic value, which in turn can be used as an economic policy; nevertheless, this approach fails to capture other choice factors. As a matter of fact, it remains unclear what additional variables might also influence a tourists' needs and behavior.

This study is subject to several limitations. Firstly, with a sample size of 266, the possibility for complex statistical analysis is limited. Secondly, the respondents were not required to have visited any CBT sites in Cambodia. This means that, even though consumers are able to imagine the maximum price (Breidert, 2006; Kalish & Nelson, 1991), it is questionable whether travelers in Phnom Penh have a clear understanding of products and services offered in CBT sites. Lastly, the paper does not consider confining factors (e.g., income) when analyzing the respondents' WTP.

This research investigated the WTP for basic tourism services in CBTs in Cambodia. Yet, this study did not consider other factors that may play a role in determining visitors' WTP. Thus, the results need to be interpreted and applied with caution. Nevertheless, this study creates a basis for subsequent research, for example investigating the WTP by applying an indirect approach using a contingent valuation method.

Additionally, this study contributes to the limited amount of research that is available on expatriates as a niche target market. As was hypothesized in the beginning, significant differences were found between the a priori market segmentation. It would be interesting to know if expatriates also show different traits to international travelers and domestic visitors in terms of their travel behavior and needs in terms of offered activities and amenities.

Subsequently, in order to address the challenges of CBT (e.g., product development), further research would be necessary to gather more knowledge regarding expectations and needs of potential tourists. Both national and international visitors are of interest here, given that most CBT projects do not have access to international market research and therefore do not know how to establish market linkages and successful cooperation. With regards to already existing research in the field of CBT, most studies adopt a qualitative approach, arguing that CBTs are unique entities and data collection (among the community members) proves to be difficult. Nevertheless, quantitative research in a similar but potentially more complex way – as it was applied in the present study – could be helpful to further our understanding of CBT on the ground and thus maximize its potential to contribute to the UN SDGs.



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